

UNITED STATES COAST GUARD MARINE SAFETY OFFICE NEW ORLEANS

MARINE SAFETY BULLETIN

Volume V, Issue III

January 2005

WATERWAYS SAFETY INFORMATION REPORT **HIGH WATER RIVER CONDITIONS**

Severe high water conditions continue to threaten the Lower Mississippi River. Current predictions show the Baton Rouge Gauge reaching a 39' crest on February 1, a full 4' above flood stage. The New Orleans Gauge, currently at 13.9', is predicted to crest at 16' on February 1, just below flood stage. Elements of the Mississippi river Crisis Action Plan (RCAP) have been implemented with support from the major elements of the applicable maritime community. As of 0600, Friday, 21 January 2005, COTP New Orleans established a safety zone from Mile 223 AHOP to Mile 241 AHOP, effectively entering the Implementation Phase of the RCAP, as the Baton Rouge gage approached 35'. Limitations on line and canal towing operations include a minimum of 280 brake horse power per barge ratio, tow sizes limited to 30 barges, use of a private assist vessels if a minimum of 3 MPH can not be maintained, tow configuration set up such that any spiked barge does not extend more than 50' beyond the head of the tow and daytime transit limitations for southbound tows are some the safety mechanisms that have been put into place. A Traffic Control Center, jointly manned by Industry reps and Coast Guard personnel, has been established to coordinate vessel movements within the safety zone.

As a reminder, COTP New Orleans initiated elements of the RCAP when the Carrollton Gage reached 12'. Restrictions include a prohibition on towing on a hawser downstream between Julia St. and Desire St. Additionally, underpowered or poorly handling vessels, based on the opinion of the master or pilot, must use a tug assist vessel while transiting Algiers Point. Barge mooring rules contained in 33 CFR 165.803 are in effect from Mile 88 to Mile 240 AHOP. Those rules include a radar surveillance requirement of fleets in low visibility conditions, no assembly or disassembly of tows during low visibility conditions, 2 or more towboats in attendance when barges are withdrawn, moved, or added where there are 8 or more barges in the fleet and mandating 1 radar equipped towboat for all fleets with 8 or more barges for each 100 barges. The COTP New Orleans is conducting regular facility visits to evaluate compliance with these requirements.

Another critical trigger point identified in the RCAP is when the Carrollton gage reaches 15'. Facility and Mid Stream operations fall into the Emergency Phase of the RCAP at that time. Holding tugs, additional lines and placement of cranes and or barges in cargo operations should be considered.

There have been a multitude of high water related casualties reported on the Ohio River, some dealing with loss of life. This afternoon a tow pushing 6 barges allided with the Highway 190 Bridge in Baton Rouge. As a result of the recent closure of the Bayou Sorrel Bridge, the volume of towboat traffic utilizing the Harvey and Algiers Locks is expected to increase dramatically. Vessel Traffic Service Lower Mississippi River will be observing compliance with a 240-brake horsepower per barge ratio and 3 MPH minimum speed while transiting Algiers Point. The COTP will continue to evaluate the need for tighter safety restrictions based on river conditions and actions taken Industry-wide by to mitigate risk.

F.M. Paskewich
Captain of the Port